

## SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

RAMIREZ CANYON PARK  
5750 RAMIREZ CANYON ROAD  
MALIBU, CALIFORNIA 90265  
PHONE (310) 589-3200  
FAX (310) 589-3207



June 20, 2005

Mr. Jason Mikaelian, AICP  
Associate Planner  
Planning and Building Services  
City of Santa Clarita  
23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 300  
Santa Clarita, California 91355

**Comments on Notice of Preparation for Soledad Townhomes Project  
(Master Case No. 04-444), Santa Clara River Watershed**

Dear Mr. Mikaelian:

The proposed project consists of the development of 30 acres of land to construct a residential community with 437 for-sale multiple-family dwelling units, a maximum of 10,000 square feet of commercial uses, associated recreation uses, and on-site private roads. (The Assessor's parcel numbers [APNs] and acres provided in the Notice of Preparation [NOP]/Initial Study [IS] do not correspond to the shape of the project site shown on the Preliminary Landscape Plan provided by you at our request. We assume that the correct project boundary is depicted by APNs 2849-027-001, 002, 003, 004, 005, and 2849-001-027.) The Preliminary Landscape Plan appears to show that the entire approximately 30 acres would be developed or modified. The NOP/IS (p. 1) states that the project site is currently graded pursuant to the recorded Parcel Map No. 20838. Traffic improvements, construction of bank stabilization along the southern bank of the Santa Clara River, and a trail system have been completed.

The Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) should explicitly explain why a new DEIR is being prepared for a recorded tract map, whether significant changes are being proposed to the previously approved project, and the reason for those changes. The DEIR should also explain the status of that tract map (i.e., expirations), and expand upon the ability of the new DEIR to allow for additional changes or improvements to the project.

The Santa Clara River is an important wildlife corridor. The proposed project is adjacent to and within the Santa Clara River. Habitat nodes and buffers should be maintained along the river corridor to maintain the ecological function, particularly in narrower areas such as the location of the proposed project.

City of Santa Clarita  
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The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy recommends that the project be limited to 250 feet from the edge of the channel. Grading and improvements should be excluded from this 250-foot-buffer, while trails and native habitat restoration should be permitted.

A fee title dedication should be required to be granted to an appropriate agency capable of managing land for resource protection such as the City of Santa Clarita, Santa Clarita Watershed Recreation and Conservation Authority, or Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority. Long-term management funding, in the form of a Community Facilities District, should also be required. This is necessary because this project site is located at a narrow point in the river. Also the land use of the large parcel just north of the river is undetermined, and absent legal assurances, it cannot be assumed that it will remain as open space.

An analysis of an aerial photo of the site and surroundings shows that the site is a chokepoint connecting to open space habitat to the south of the Santa Clara River. (Development along Soledad Canyon Road hinders open space connections to the south, just east and west of the project site.) The Conservancy recommends that the western tip of the project site be avoided. The project and DEIR alternatives should provide a minimum 200-foot-wide wildlife corridor on the site to take advantage of the open space associated with the Metrolink facility, just south of Soledad Canyon Road. A fee title dedication should also be required of this open space, under the same conditions as described above.

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The DEIR should provide an estimate of the acreage of alluvial scrub, if any, to be impacted by the proposed project. All impacts to this vegetation type should be avoided.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. Please direct any questions and all future correspondence to Judi Tamasi of our staff at the above address and by phone at (310) 589-3200, ext. 121.

Sincerely,



ELIZABETH A. CHEADLE  
Chairperson

RECEIVED  
PLANNING DIVISION

MAY 19 2005

## SCOPE

**Santa Clarita Organization for Planning and the Environment**

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
CITY OF SANTA CLARITA

TO PROMOTE, PROTECT AND PRESERVE THE ENVIRONMENT, ECOLOGY  
AND QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE SANTA CLARITA VALLEY

POST OFFICE BOX 1182, SANTA CLARITA, CA 91386

5-18-05



Jason Mikaelian  
City of Santa Clarita  
23920 Valencia Blvd.  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

Re: Soledad Townhome Project Notice of Preparation

Dear Sirs:

We concur with your finding that an environmental impact report must be prepared. However, we would like to express our disagreement with the findings you have made in other areas and request that certain additional issues be addressed.

### Significant Impact to Riparian Habitat

This project is in a significant ecological area overlay. We find it disturbing that the City of Santa Clarita issued a grade and fill permit for a very old previous project located at this site, full well knowing that this project would not be built. Now the NOP describes a project requiring a zone change, which is a totally discretionary approval, and requiring new environmental review. The new NOP states that a review of impacts to riparian habitat does not need to be conducted because grading has already been completed. This smacks of an effort on behalf of the City to avoid disclosure of impacts and evade the proper CEQA process requiring disclosure and mitigation of such impacts. The fact that the former head of the Dept. of Planning under which this grading permit was granted is now working for Newhall Land and Farming/Lennar Corp. as the consultant for this project further the appearance of impropriety in the CEQA process.

We believe that cumulative loss of upland habitat is severely impacting the survival of several threatened and endangered species. Such species will be further impacted by human activities in this area that will be increased if townhomes are located here instead of the previously proposed commercial project. Further, riparian habitat can easily be re-established. Thus we believe that impacts to the riparian habitat of this area PREVIOUS to the grading that the City, perhaps illegally, has allowed, must be addressed in this environmental impact report.

### Impacts to Water Quality

As the City is aware, the Sanitation District is not meeting the Chloride TMDL for the upper reaches of the Santa Clara River. This project will increase reliance on State Water Project water and thus increase the chloride level in the treated effluent water

released to the Santa Clara River. This issue should be addressed and mitigated from a cumulative aspect as well as a project specific aspect.

We disagree with your finding that his project is not large enough to impact ground water recharge areas (p.22). Cumulative loss of recharge areas along the Santa Clara River is substantial. Such loss of recharge will damage the ability of the water agencies to supply ground water in the future. We believe you must address this issue from a cumulative perspective and calculate loss of recharge from this project in addition to the many others that have been approved in recharge areas along the Santa Clara River in the last ten years (i.e. North Val I and North Val II, Riverpark, and other projects immediately adjacent to the Santa Clara River).

Loss of recharge will also affect water quality. We request that the EIR address increased nitrate levels and migration of VOC's and ammonium perchlorate pollution.

Since migration of ammonium perchlorate has now affected a new Valencia Water Supply Well (Q2) immediately downstream from this project and from the recently filled project area, we further request a full disclosure of the origin of the fill dirt used to fill this area. Did it come from the vicinity of the Whittiker Bermite project? How much dirt was moved and used to fill this project? We believe that Item J, pg. 6 must still be addressed even though the fill has already been completed.

#### Seismic Hazard Zone

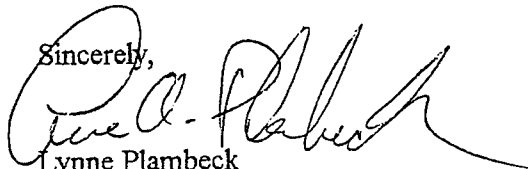
We believe that the statement made on page 5 and 19 that this area is not in a seismic hazard zone is inaccurate and out-dated. The City of Santa Clara's General Plan was approved in 1990 and has not been updated. In 1996, the Div. of Mines released new Seismic Hazard Maps. The map covering this quadrant (Newhall 7.5 Quadrangle, dated Feb. 1996) clearly indicates that this area may be hazardous because it potentially contains liquefaction materials. Liquefaction must therefore be addressed in the EIR. Failure to do so may affect the safety of future residents.

#### Utilities

We concur with your finding that water availability from current entitlements must be addressed. We request that the City further include an evaluation of how cumulative loss of recharge may affect water supply, surface flow and public trust water flows in the Santa Clara River. Also, how additional pumping will affect the migration of the ammonium perchlorate pollution plume should be addressed.

Thank-you for your time and attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,



Lynne Plambeck  
President



## Friends of the Santa Clara River

660 Randy Drive, Newbury Park, California 91320-8036 • 805/498-4323  
May 18, 2005

MAY 20 2005

Mr. Jason Mikaelian  
City of Santa Clarita  
23920 Valencia Blvd.  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
CITY OF SANTA CLARITA

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Mountains Chapter

Santa Clarita  
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Sierra Club  
Angeles Chapter  
Los Padres Chapter

### Surfrider Foundation

Audubon Society  
Ventura Chapter

Ventura County  
Environmental  
Coalition

Wishtoyo  
Foundation

Re: Notice of Preparation of EIR for Soledad Townhomes Project

Dear Mr. Mikaelian:

We agree with your finding that an Environmental Impact Report must be prepared for the project. Some of the environmental factors in the Initial Study must be reevaluated, however.

This project most definitely could have significant impacts on biological resources, including cumulative impacts. The unprecedented growth in the Santa Clara River watershed over the last few decades has caused an array of cumulative impacts to flora and fauna. Continued encroachment by development into the River floodplain and terrace lands has resulted in habitat loss and fragmentation. Further, the continued filling and channelization of the River has altered and is altering the hydrology of the watershed, increasing storm runoff and decreasing water quality (the River is now impaired for ammonia, chloride, coliform, nitrate/nitrite and organic enrichment). These cumulative impacts must be addressed in all project EIRs.

Even though the project area is graded, the addition of homes and commercial development to the site will, most assuredly, have significant biological impacts. This is true because of urban edge effects, which include illegal ORV use and predation on riparian species by household pets, will degrade riparian biological values. Adequate buffer zones protecting these resources have not been provided, and the function of the river terrace area as wildlife habitat or wildlife corridor will be eliminated.

We cite two scientific studies in support of our statement that urban development degrades adjacent biological resources. The first (Kelly et al, 1993) is a paper by two University of California Riverside scientists entitled "Buffer Zones for Ecological Reserves in California: Replacing Guesswork with Science". This paper shows that even nature reserves over a mile in width suffer urban edge effects at their centers - and of course the Santa Clara River riparian corridor is much narrower than these reserves and even more susceptible to such effects. The second (Rottenborn, 1999) is a paper by a Stanford University scientist entitled "Predicting the impacts of urbanization on riparian bird communities".

This paper shows impacts to bird communities out to a distance of 500 meters, or over 1500 feet, from the urban edge.

As for water quality, you may be aware that the Sanitation District is not currently meeting the Chloride TMDL for the upper reaches of the Santa Clara River. This project will exacerbate this problem by increased use of state water, which is high in chloride. Mitigation is required.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Bottorff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ron" clearly legible and the last name "Bottorff" written in a more stylized, connected script.

Ron Bottorff, Chair

References:

- Kelly, Patrick J. and John T. Rotenberry, *Buffer Zones for Ecological Reserves in California: Replacing Guesswork with Science*, in *Interface Between Ecology and Land Development in California*, Southern California Academy of Sciences, 1993.
- Rottenborn, S.C. *Predicting the impacts of urbanization on riparian bird communities*, Biological Conservation 88 (1999).



Carollee K. Krieger  
president

June 20, 2005

Dorothy Green  
secretary

Joan H. Wells  
treasurer

Melinda Chaulnard  
director

Jason Mikaelian  
City of Santa Clarita  
23920 Valencia Blvd.  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355  
FAX: (661) 259-8125

Yvon Chaulnard  
director

**RE: Soledad Townhome Project Notice of Preparation**

Hap Dunning  
director

Dear Mr. Mikaelian:

Michael Jackson  
director

Huey Johnson  
director

Imaging Spence  
director

The California Water Impact Network (C-WIN) objects to the proposed Soledad Townhome Project relying on a contested transfer of 41,000 acre feet (AF) of SWP allocation from the Kern County Water Agency to the Castaic Lake Water Agency (CLWA) as a reliable source of water supply as indicated in the SB610 Water Assessment Report. The analysis is inappropriately relying on the permanence of a non-final and highly contested transfer of 41,000 acre feet of SWP water from the Kern County Water Agency. This 41,000 acre foot transfer continues to be clouded by ongoing litigation and its very validity is one of the subjects of the forthcoming and very complex EIR known as "Monterey Plus", to be prepared by the state Department of Water Resources.

C-WIN is currently a plaintiff in several cases against CLWA opposing proposed transfers that depend on the 41,000 AF transfer mentioned above. Any transfer that is dependent on a water source that is not free and clear is not reliable. C-WIN hereby incorporates our January 1, 2004 objection letter to the CLWA on the Negative Declaration for a proposed 35,000 AF transfer for a Groundwater Banking Project that depends on this same 41,000 AF transfer and the C-WIN February 3, 2004 objection letter to the LA County Regional Planning Department on the proposed West Creek Project #98-008 (2,545 units) that depends on this same 41,000 AF transfer. We also incorporate our February 26, 2004 objection letter to the County of Los Angeles Regional Planning Department regarding the proposed River Valley Project No.00-196 (1,444 units & 1.5 million square feet of mixed non-residential) that also relies on this 41,000 acre foot transfer. Further, we incorporate our letter to the City of Santa Clarita on May 4, 2004 objecting to the River Park Project, Project No. 02-175 (1,183 units), our letter of December 16, 2004 objecting to the Northlake Project No. 98-047 (specific plan of approximately 3,000 units) and our letter of June 15, 2005 to the City of Santa Clarita opposing the Synergy Project (946 units). Also, we incorporate our comments on the Mission Village Project No. 04-181 (5,331 units, 1,299,000 million square feet commercial/mixed use, etc) submitted June 15, 2005 to the County of LA Regional Planning Department. All of these projects, depending upon this same questionable 41,000 AF water transfer, must be looked at cumulatively, not as individual projects depending on the same source of water. Urban Water Management Plans require that cumulative impacts must be assessed; cumulative impacts must be addressed here as well.

P.O. Box 5462, Santa Barbara, CA 93150, email: caroleekrieger@cox.net, Phone: 805.969.6824, Fax: 805.565-3394

The Soledad Townhome Project, along with many other developments in California, is dependent on the analysis by DWR and its State Water Project Delivery Reliability Report, Final 2002. This Reliability Report has been seriously criticized for overstating actual available supply, questionable modeling and simulations, and lack of proper peer review. C-WIN hereby incorporates this Final Report, including all of the published comment letters in Appendix E. Please make a special note of those letters submitted by Senator Michael Machado, Robert Wilkinson, Arve Sjøvold, Joan Wells, Dr. Peter Gleick and myself.

C-WIN also incorporates "A Strategic Review of CALSIM II and its Use for Water Planning, Management, and Operations in Central California" submitted by the California Bay Delta Authority Science Program Association of Bay Governments, December 4, 2003. This document raises significant questions as to the reliability of DWR's Delivery Reliability Report.

Please reject the proposed Soledad Townhome Project consisting of **437 townhouses** on the grounds that the proposed water supply is inadequate and unsubstantiated at this time and cumulative impacts have not been assessed.

Please address all the above issues in the forthcoming Environmental Impact Report. If you are unable to obtain any of the above documents, please contact us and we will provide them.

Please send me any relevant documents that may come out in the future regarding this project.

C-WIN hereby incorporates all other comments by reference opposing the proposed Soledad Townhome Project.

Sincerely,



Carolee K. Krieger  
President, C-WIN  
808 Romero Canyon Road  
Santa Barbara, CA 93108  
PH: (805) 969-0824